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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002504

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SUBJECT: TURKEY PULLS BACK FROM CONFRONTATION OVER PKK

REF: ANKARA 2500

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (c) Summary: Turkey is pulling back from a confrontation with us over PKK violence that took place here last weekend -- at least for now. This was the implicit message given by MFA U/S Apakan, who convoked Ambassador late on October 9 to discuss the PKK attacks. A similar measured and non-confrontational announcement was put out by Turkey's Higher Counterterrorism Board that met today. Apakan stressed the frustration caused by the deaths of 16 security forces personnel over the last three days; spoke about the importance of the recent Turkey-Iraq counterterrorism agreement; and appealed for more political will among US, European and Iraqi political leaders to confront terrorism. We assess that the Turkish authorities have decided not to go over the top at this time and pending Wednesday's vote in the House Foreign Affairs Committee on the Armenian genocide resolution (AGR). How long this moderate line lasts will be influenced by the HFAC vote and what comes next from the PKK, but the government also does not want to abandon hope that political and cooperative strategies against the PKK and extremism in Turkey's southeast may bear fruit. End Summary.

12. (c) U/S Apakan said his country is suffering following the deaths of security personnel over the weekend, and the reaction is very sharp. The president, PM and CHOD had met Monday, and the Higher Counterterrorism Board met today. Apakan said Turkey will be speaking with Iraq. It appreciates US help in countering the PKK through many channels bilaterally, in Europe and with the Iraqis. The public and government want to see this cooperation result in something tangible. This would counter the image the PKK and "some others in northern Iraq" are spreading that this terrorism operates under US protection or auspices -- an image the government knows does not reflect reality, but the public here believes. Turkey, Apakan argued, looks for more political determination among its friends and allies in fighting the PKK and other terrorist threats, and PM Erdogan will make this point when he sees President Bush next month. Apakan hastened to add that his remarks were not accusations against the US, but positive statements on what Turkey wants to see to further US-Turkish relations and the struggle against terror.

13. (c) Apakan and MFA DG for Security Guven commented on the Counterterrorism Board meeting, which they attended. Frustration was very high, as are expectations of Turkey,s friends and neighboring Iraq. The lack of cooperation with Iraq was noted, along with the need for ratification of the bilateral CT agreement concluded last month and then tangible results flowing from it. Guven complained that the agreement had been denounced by both Irbil and the Turkish political opposition, which puts the government in a difficult position. He said Iraqi PM aide Ali Dabbagh visited the Turkish embassy in Baghdad today to express condolences and ask what Iraq could do. The Turkish ambassador reportedly urged a simple government statement of condemnation for the attacks and condolences to the families. Apakan concluded that Turkey will look toward a Neighbors of Iraq Interior Ministers meeting o/a October 20-23 in Kuwait and the Expanded Neighbors FM meeting in Istanbul November 2-3 as opportunities for a strong condemnation of terrorism and to push for conclusion of a Turkey-Iraq agreement on border security) the disputed Article 4 of their CT agreement (re "hot pursuit," etc.).

14. (c) Ambassador reiterated the condolences he had extended by phone the day before and drew attention to the Department,s statement on the recent violence, which Apakan greatly appreciated. Ambassador said we have been in touch with the Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish authorities to remind them of the need for action against the PKK and to urge a government statement of condolences. He said the timing of this violence suggests a deliberate effort by the PKK to poison an improved atmosphere on Kurdish issues in Turkey following parliamentary and presidential elections here; to

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poison Turkish-Iraqi cooperation that, among other things, threatens the PKK; and to poison US-Turkish relations at a time of significant strain over the AGR. We need not to let the PKK succeed in those objectives, and that means sticking together, Ambassador argued.

15. (c) Comment: At no time did Apakan refer to possible military action across the border or even repeat the public mantra here that patience is running out. We read this as a deliberate effort at least privately to lower the temperature and avoid a confrontation with the US ahead of the AGR vote on Wednesday. A similar, non-confrontational statement following today's Counterterrorism Board meeting (septel) signals that the government recognizes its potential for achieving permanent progress on domestic Kurdish issues that it does not want to scupper. Key variables as things move forward are the HFAC vote, what the PKK does next, and real or imagined provocations by the Turkish military -- aka the Deep State.

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